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MASS LINE AND "MASS
CRITICISM" IN CHINA:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE
FALL OF LIU SHAO-CH'I

/ Lowell Dittmer*

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) was a unique event, but understanding of this event and its meaning within the broader context of the Chinese political system may be enhanced if we use more general concepts of political action to abstract certain characteristics for special attention. The concepts *mass line* and *criticism* and *self-criticism* (also known as "inner-Party struggle") seem particularly appropriate for such an analysis for three reasons: They avoid the dangers of prematurely or uncritically applying Western concepts to political realities which are embedded in a different context of cultural meanings; they are central concepts in the vocabulary of Chinese Communist political action, and as such have been beneficiaries of both primary analyses by Chinese political thinkers and secondary analyses by Western social scientists; the explicit "methodology" of the GPCR is couched in the same language originally used to set forth the implications of these concepts, suggesting that their use as explanatory models corresponds with the subjective intentions of the Maoist sponsors of the GPCR.

The GPCR may be understood as an attempt to *unite* criticism and self-criticism with the mass line by opening inner-Party struggle to mass participation. This attempt, however, took place in a social context quite different from the one in which the mass line formula originated, and had entirely different consequences. This study of "mass criticism" begins with a brief summary of the changes which have taken place since original formulation of the mass line model during the *Cheng-feng* rectification movement at Yen-an. This is followed by an empirical description, based on content analysis of the Chinese official and Red Guard press criticisms for a 34-month period (from January 1967 to October 1969) of the operation of the model in the new circumstances of the criticism campaign against Liu

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Shao-ch'i.¹ It concludes with a comparison of the implications of the original theory of mass line with the operational consequences of its revival (in combination with criticism and self-criticism) in a structurally altered milieu.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASS LINE

Both the mass line and inner-Party struggle seem to have assumed definitive theoretical form during the Yen'an Party rectification movement of 1942-44. Whereas inner-Party struggle was intended primarily to function as a mode of decision-making and conflict management among cadres at the same hierarchical level (often members of the same work team or Party committee), the mass line was meant to facilitate communication and create policy consensus *between* hierarchical levels. "We must teach the masses clearly what we received from them confusedly," Mao explained to Malraux;² politically relevant information was to circulate "from the masses, to the masses." The "masses" in question were both rank-and-file members of the CCP and "non-Party masses," as Mao made clear in "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership" (June 1, 1943), "Get Organized!" (November 29, 1943), and "On Strengthening the Party Committee System" (September 28, 1943); however, the non-Party masses played a much more passive role than they were later to play in the GPCR.³ Cadres first observed the masses' "scattered and unsystematic views" in order to identify problems; they then summed up these scattered views in reports, which were forwarded to the highest committee responsible in that region. The committee then issued authoritative directions or instructions, which were sent back through the apparatus to be explained and popularized among the masses. To emphasize the fluidity and interconnectedness between discrete steps in the process, Lewis condenses his description into a single hyphenated verb: "Problem identification-investigation-preliminary decision-testing-revision-report-authoritative decision-implementation-supervision-new problem comprises the life cycle of the action affecting a particular policy decision."⁴

¹The sample includes all critical articles translated in *Survey of the China Mainland Press (SCMP)*, *Selections from China Mainland Magazines (SCMM)*, *Current Background (CB)* and their Supplements during this period. It would have been preferable to base the sample on the untranslated Chinese press, but the difficulty in finding a corresponding sample of Red Guard (RG) newspapers in the U.S. made such a project unfeasible. The sample's validity is based on the assumption that the cited translation services select a fairly representative sample of articles from the Chinese press to translate and that there is no systematic bias in this respect on this topic.

²André Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), pp. 369-370.

³Chou En-Lai alludes to the more passive role of the "masses" in a comparison of the GPCR with the Yen'an *cheng-feng*: "The rectification campaign was carried out during war time and could be carried out only among the cadres of higher levels. Moreover, not many of the cadres of higher levels were able to hoist high the great red flag of Mao Tse-tung's Thought." *Hung chan-pao* (Red Battle News), Canton, No. 15 (Nov. 9, 1967), pp. 1-4, in *Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS)*, No. 44574 (March 4, 1968).

⁴John W. Lewis, *Leadership in Communist China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 72-73.

That the CCP is unique among Communist Parties in its development and continued use of this process of communication is perhaps due in part to the particular circumstances surrounding its origin. The mass line was developed in the primitive conditions of the Yen-an base area. Due to the peasant backgrounds and low literacy rate of the participants, communication was predominantly oral and face-to-face, usually taking place within small-group meetings. The content of these discussions was both "educational" and "critical": the educational element consisted of group "study" (*hsüeh-hsi*) of selected CCP documents; the critical element consisted of reflexively apprehending the norms implied in criticisms of earlier purge victims, such as Ch'en Tu-hsiu, Wang Ming, or of errant members of the group.

When the CCP came to power in 1949, both criticism and self-criticism and the mass line became integrated into the structure of political authority. The fairly loose relationship between the two communication processes became functionally and chronologically distinct: "Criticism and self-criticism" became a mechanism of decision, conflict management and discipline at the highest level of leadership, and an educational or disciplinary device at lower echelons; the "mass line" governed the relationship between elites and low-level cadres and masses. The distinction between the two was clearly visible in the two high-level purges that took place between 1949 and 1966: those of Kao Kang and Jao Shu-shih in 1955, and that of P'eng Teh-huai in 1959. In both cases, organizational sanctions were first decided through inner-Party criticism and self-criticism, and the mass line was used *afterwards* to invoke mass criticism as a way of generating reflexive moral enthusiasm for some unrelated project—in the former case the first 5-year plan and in the latter an adjustment to the failure of the Great Leap Forward.

As the regime's concern with rapid economic development and efficient administration became more marked, and its communicative capacity increased, whatever representative or grievance redress functions the mass line had once served tended to diminish. The regime acquired a monopoly over political communication which, in the words of Frederick T. C. Yu, "encompasses almost all feasible vehicles of human expression and means of influencing attitudes and behavior."⁵ Moreover, efforts were made to *increase* the flow of communications between elites and masses by augmenting the oral network with "multiplicative media," which made it possible (in theory) for the Center to issue a message to every participant in identical form. This transformed the nature of the relationship between masses and representatives of the elite: instead of oral agitators roaming the countryside, human transmitters became attached to each medium, resulting in newspaper-reading groups, radio-listening groups, book-reading groups and film-discussion groups.⁶ This tended to enhance the authority of the cadre

⁵Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Praeger, 1964), p. 4.

⁶This point was made in a personal communication from Alan P. L. Liu. See his book, *Communications and National Integration in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

(who could now point to the message in the newspaper, which the peasant was often unable to read) while at the same time decreasing his flexibility in tailoring his message to the audience, and reducing his susceptibility to feedback. The net effect of the introduction of “multiplicative media” to the mass line system was to increase the persuasive capabilities of the Center without correspondingly increasing the communicative competence of the masses, resulting in growing apathy on the part of the masses toward attempts on the part of elites to mobilize them.⁷

Mao’s concern with the general problem of communicative alienation between elites and masses first became evident after the Hungarian uprising in 1956, when he attempted to encourage greater mass participation in politics in the “Hundred Flowers” campaign. The elite consensus was that in this pioneering attempt to give the masses a voice in political affairs, (the “masses” consisting at the time of the more articulate sectors of the “bourgeois” intelligentsia and the student community) went well beyond the permissible threshold of dissent, but the aborted experiment did leave one legacy to the rather top-heavy Chinese communication system: the “big-character poster” (*ta-tzu pao*), which had made its appearance previously, but never on as large a scale. A poster could be written by anyone and could achieve high local visibility, though communication between cities or campuses was interdicted by the Party organization.⁸

The big-character poster turned out to be the opening wedge for a number of communicative innovations which were to destroy completely the Party’s institutional monopoly over elite-mass communication during the GPCR. Posters, of course, “covered every available wall or mat,” and these were supplemented by more than 100 Red Guard tabloids (*hsiao-pao*), some of which appeared daily, others periodically; some printed, others hectographed; some original, others plagiarized. Some even had national circulations (e.g., for several months in 1967, Tsinghua’s *Ch’ingkuangshan* had a circulation second only to that of *People’s Daily*).⁹ The interdict on intercity communication was set aside to maximize participation-mobilization, and Red Guards set up a network of liaison stations which functioned like diplomatic missions, facilitated by free access to telegraph and transportation facilities. These were highly effective in disseminating information; for example, in July 1967, Chiang Ch’ing’s instruction to “attack with reason and defend with force” was followed within a few hours by Red Guard arms seizures, although this message was not relayed by the official press until a

⁷James R. Townsend provides convincing documentation for the trend from participation to mobilization in *Political Participation in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), particularly the concluding chapter.

⁸*op. cit.*, also Rene Goldman, “The Rectification Campaign at Peking University,” *China Quarterly* (CQ), No. 12 (Oct.-Dec. 1962), pp. 138-54.

⁹T. K. Tong, “Red Guard Newspapers,” *Columbia Forum*, XII:1 (Spring 1969), pp. 38-41. *Hsin Pei-ta* (Peking University), *Red Flag* (Peking Aeronautical Institute), and *Tung-fang-hung* (Peking Geological Institute) all relatively “radical” papers, also had national circulations.

a few days later.¹⁰ The new, alternative media system was characterized by frankness, spontaneity and lack of uniformity, and seemed to reach a younger and more urban audience. The *raison d'être* of an alternative system was the availability of extraordinary information, specifically *polemical* information which had never appeared in the official press because of the latter's domination by "revisionist" officials; the Red Guard press hence became dedicated exclusively to polemics, and showed an inherent tendency to sensationalize.

The advent of a nation-wide extra-party press was only one of the unique features of "mass criticism" as practiced during the GPCR. A second feature, already alluded to, was the dissolution of the post-1949 distinction between "criticism and self-criticism" and "mass line": Mao opted to proceed with his purge even *before* receiving "slight majority" approval for his plans at the 11th plenum, and the "mass line" was thus initiated *prior to elite agreement on criticism targets*. The resulting uncertainty as to the identity of the targets tended to provoke an indiscriminate attack on all "authorities," since the masses lacked the political information to distinguish between "capitalist-roaders" and proletarian revolutionaries, when both "waved a Red Flag."

Third, having grown suspicious of the Party organization, which he believed harbored many of his opponents, Mao tried to *divorce ideology from organization* and to dispense with the latter altogether. The new elite-mass communications network changed from well-structured channels along a hierarchical line of organization to direct communication between elites and masses; this pattern was characterized by multiplicity of channels (Red Guard rallies, "special instructions" issued on an ad hoc basis by elites, speeches delivered by leaders in person, "leaked" black materials, etc.) and the absence of any "gatekeeper" to regulate the flow of information. The main communications channel consisted of editorials and keynote polemical articles in the national news media, such as *Red Flag*, *People's Daily*, and *Liberation Army Daily*; an unprecedented number of speeches by Maoist leaders at both big rallies and small-group interviews supplemented this channel with authoritative interpretations in the light of particular local circumstances. Although this new communications network had the desired effect of dissolving "bureaucratic" impediments to elite-mass communications, it had the dysfunctional effects of exposing elites to direct mass pressure (e.g., Red Guard demonstrations calling for a repudiation of Liu Shao-ch'i outside the building where Politburo Standing Committee meetings were being held), and exacerbating factionalism at both elite and mass levels by permitting alliances to form between members of the elite and ideologically sympathetic rebel constituencies.

All three of these problems—the (limited) polemical autonomy of an alternative communications system, the indiscriminate attack on *all* author-

ities, and factionalism among both Red Guards and elites—reached critical proportions during the January 1967 “movement to seize power.” One solution to the crises brought about by his own radical attempt to eliminate alienation between elite and mass was for Mao to request the PLA and “liberated” cadres to restore order, but this militated against the basic ideological goals the GPCR was meant to achieve, and Mao resorted to this solution only sporadically and with obvious reluctance. It was in order to solve these problems without repudiating or suppressing the mass criticism he had unleashed that Mao decided in late March 1967 to turn the full force of the movement against Liu Shao-ch’i.

LIU SHAO-CH’I AS SYMBOL AND SCAPEGOAT

If Liu Shao-ch’i was politically impotent after his demotion at the August 1966 11th Central Committee Plenum, the *meaning* of Liu Shao-ch’i as the mastermind of the suppressive work-team strategy of June-July 1966 lived on in the hearts of all involved in the GPCR, quite regardless of Liu’s attempts to atone for that “error” through self-criticism. Because the organizational apparatus which had previously been used to lead mass movements was discredited by the repudiation of work teams, and because the use of the PLA to suppress the masses was at variance with the participatory ideals the GPCR was meant to promote, the Maoists attempted to manipulate the meaning of Liu Shao-ch’i through the mass media in order to guide and control the movement *reflexively*.

An inspection of the relationship between criticisms of Liu and criticisms of all other “Party persons in authority taking the capitalist road” indicates that at different times and for different reasons Liu was (1) a *symbol* for all “capitalist-roaders,” used as a rallying call for rebellion against an entire category of elites; and (2) a *scapegoat* for other capitalist-roaders, a villain against whom both anti-Liuists and erstwhile pro-Liuists could unite in common villification.¹¹ It seems clear that within both the Red Guard and official presses, Liu functioned to some extent as a symbol. This is indicated by the positive correlation both between Red Guard criticisms of Liu and Red Guard criticisms of other targets (i.e., between the solid line and the short dash line minus the dotted line in Figure 1) and between official criticisms of Liu and official criticisms of others (between solid and long dash minus solid).¹²

However, a comparison of the two presses reveals considerable inter-press variation in the degree of symbolization achieved. The centrally controlled official press was able to achieve a much higher concentration of criticisms against Liu Shao-ch’i than the Red Guard press throughout the period under

¹¹It should be emphasized that the “scapegoat/symbol” conceptualization does not exhaust the polemical “meaning” of Liu Shao-ch’i, but refers only to his substitutability for other “power-holders.”

¹²The correlation coefficients within Red Guard and official presses are .55 and .138, respectively; only correlation between Red Guard criticisms of Liu and Red Guard criticism of others is statistically significant ($p < .01$).

study. The clear and highly significant ($p < .00001$) relationship between *source* of criticism and relative concentration on criticism *target* is shown in the following four-fold table:

TABLE I
Relationship Between Criticism Source and Target Focus

Target	Official	Red Guard
Liu	243	31
Other	78	197

Furthermore, Figure 1 indicates that while the proportion of criticisms of Liu among total official criticisms remained relatively constant and even increased after August 1968, the proportion of criticisms of Liu among total Red Guard criticisms tended to decrease over time. The renewed outburst of criticisms in both official and Red Guard presses in the spring of 1968 was not matched by an increase in Red Guard criticisms of Liu, and by August of that year Red Guard criticisms had ceased entirely. This suggests that Red Guard enthusiasm with the criticism of Liu was quite short-lived—that by the summer of 1967 the Red Guard had concluded that Liu was a “dead tiger” unneeded of further polemical attention.

Within the two presses Liu functioned to a varying extent as a symbol, but in the relationship *between* the two presses (i.e., between solid and long-dash lines and between dotted and short-dash lines in Figure 1) he clearly functioned as a scapegoat. To be more specific, the official press invoked Liu to prevent Red Guard criticism from proliferating to other targets, as factional infighting menaced the GPCR with dissolution of its meaning and alienation of its support from the PLA and other moderate elements in the Maoist coalition. The use of Liu as a scapegoat to deflect attacks on lesser targets is evident in the inverse relationship between official attacks on Liu and Red Guard criticisms. Over the 17-month period when both presses were operating (from April 1967 through August 1968), there is a statistically significant negative correlation (Pearson $r = .47$, $p < .01$) between official criticisms of Liu Shao-ch'i and total Red Guard criticisms; there is also a negative correlation ($-.66$, $p < .01$) between official criticisms of Liu and Red Guard criticisms of *other* targets.

To summarize our findings heretofore concerning the alternate functions of Liu in the Red Guard and official media, the data suggest that the Red Guards were inclined to use Liu as a “symbol” for attacks on diverse local

targets, whereas the official press tried to use him as a "scapegoat" to *deflect* attacks from these same targets. In the course of the movement there was a cyclical contrapuntal interplay between "democracy" and "centralism," and Liu's function alternated accordingly. The operation of the factors responsible for the alternation of function between symbol and scapegoat can be elucidated by a time-series analysis of the dynamics of the movement.

One can discern, with varying degrees of clarity, several trends. The secular trend was for criticisms to mount in a series of *steps* beginning in the fall of 1966 and culminating in an all-time high with the launching of the official press campaign in April 1967, then generally diminishing from that high point to the 12th CC Plenum in October 1968, which precipitated another upsurge, this one entirely dominated by the official press. The seasonal trend was for criticisms to escalate sharply after New Year's and during the spring months April and May; in the summer months that followed criticism tended to proliferate and become extreme, even violent; in the late summer and autumn the authorities interceded and imposed settlements between conflicting Red Guard factions and there was a season of consolidation (repression, from the rebel viewpoint). Due to a shift of targets in mid-campaign, the first year (1966) deviated slightly from this pattern. After a spring offensive (directed not against Liu Shao-ch'i but against the "three-family village" of anti-Maoist literati and the P'eng Chen/Lu Ting-yi "black backers" who shielded them), which was suddenly launched in April,¹³ criticism subsided during the June-July "50 days" under the suppressive influence of the work teams dispatched by Liu and Teng. Criticism briefly revived in August without being directed at any clear target group, subsided somewhat in September, then resumed steady escalation (without official sanction) through October, November and December, to climax in the "January storm." The second and third years followed the seasonal pattern more closely, indicating improved central coordination of the movement. This seasonal criticism cycle seems to reflect the plant-and-harvest exigencies of China's agricultural economy. As J. D. Simmonds has noted in an analysis of policy-making from 1959-66, the late summer and autumn months tend to be a time for major policy discussion, because crops are entering the late stage of the growing period and the national agricultural exchequer can first be assessed.¹⁴ The two seasonal "revolutionary high tides" thus awaited completion and official stock-taking of the autumn harvest in mid-December and completion of spring planting at the end of March.

The monthly trend was for criticisms to escalate at the first of each month and to diminish in the second half. The variables which determined the

¹³Only 90 articles appeared concerning Wu Han in the three-month period between January and March, but in April, 4,000 articles appeared within three weeks. Marianne Bastid, "Origines et Développement de la Révolution culturelle," *Politique Étrangère*, 32:1 (Summer 1967), pp. 68-87.

¹⁴J. D. Simmonds, *China: Evolution of a Revolution* (Department of International Relations Working Paper No. 9, Australian National University, 1968), p. 101.

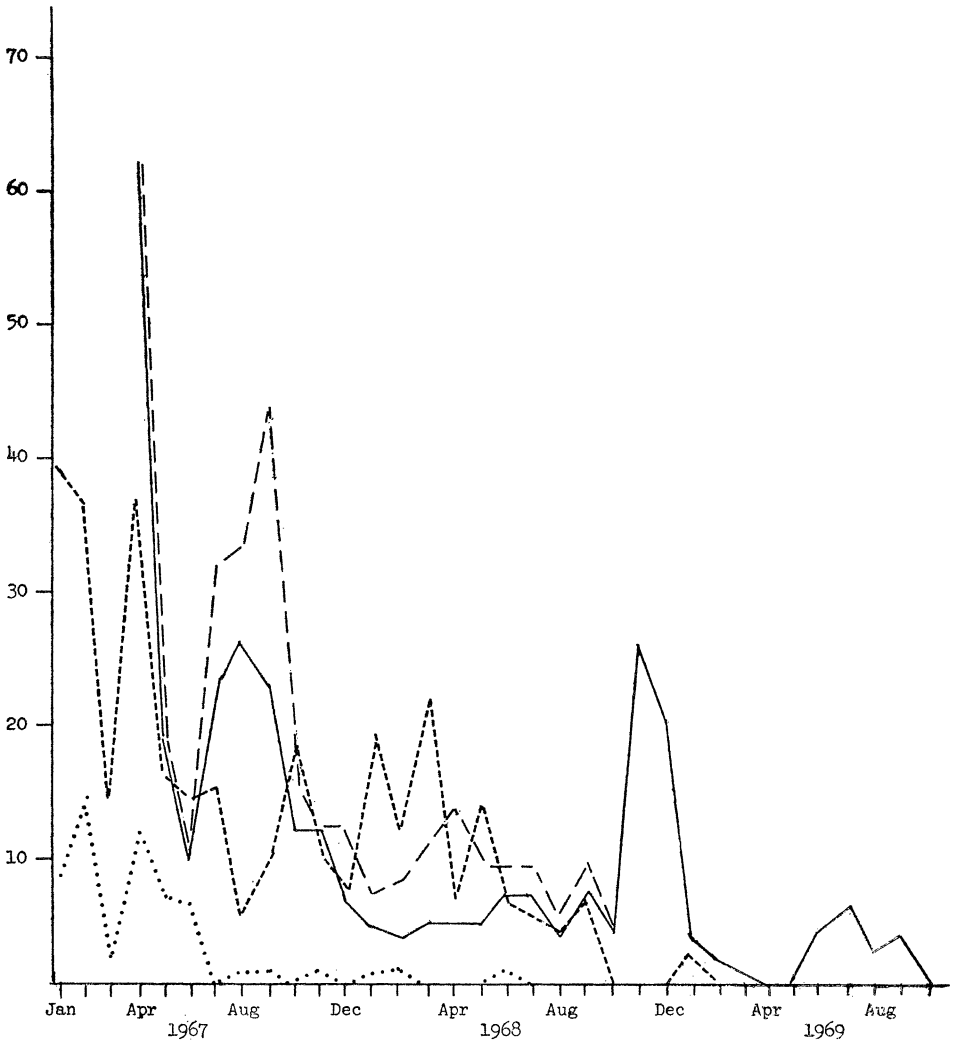


FIGURE 1: CHRONOLOGY OF CRITICISM

KEY

- Red Guard Criticisms of Liu = dotted line
- Off. Press Criticisms of Liu = solid line
- Total Red Guard Criticisms of "Authorities" = short-dash line
- Total Off. Press Criticisms of "Authorities" = long-dash line

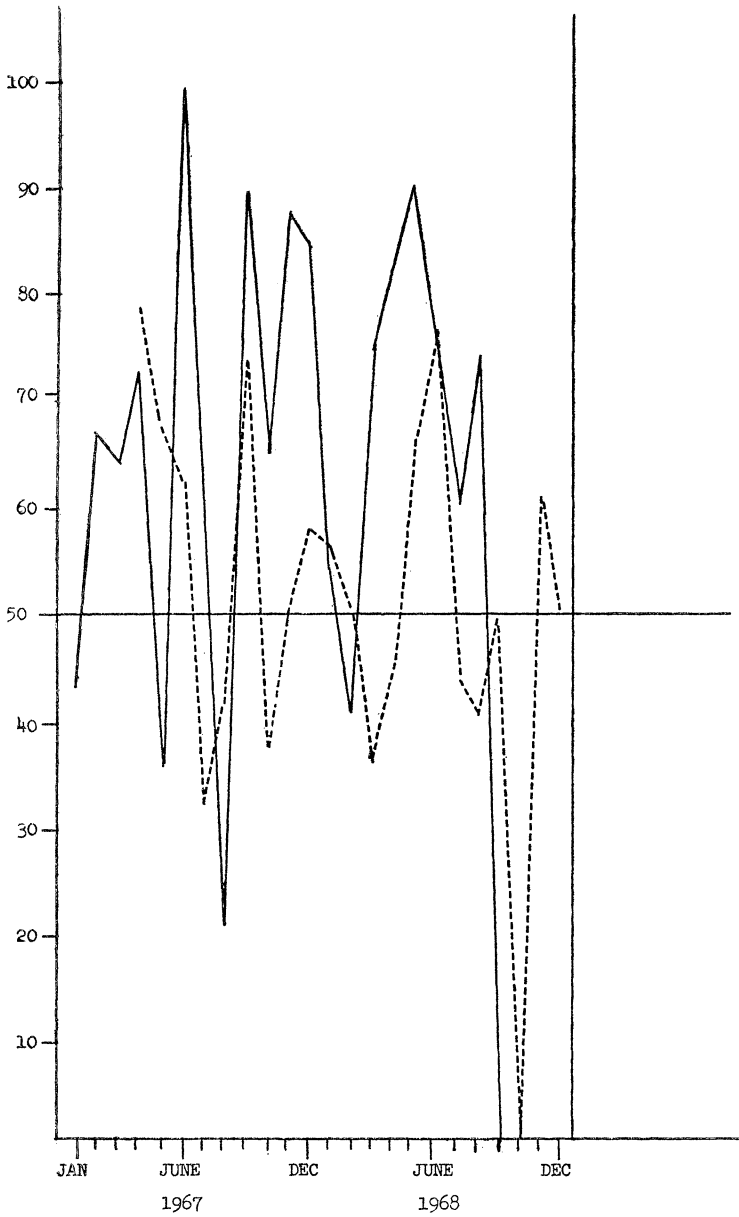


FIGURE 2: INTRA-MONTHLY CRITICISM DEPLETION
January 1967-June 1969
KEY

Percentage of Red Guard Criticisms in First Half of Month = solid line
Percentage of Off. Press Criticisms in First Half of Month = dashed line

intra-monthly dynamics of mass criticism are presented in the following contingency table:

TABLE II
Intra-Monthly Criticism Diffusion and Depletion Variables
Time: Month

Target	First half	Last half
Liu	A	B
Others	C	D

Two intra-monthly propensities were exhibited in the course of the criticism movement: first, a greater total number of criticisms tended to be published during the first half of the month than the last half, which we call the intra-monthly *depletion* propensity. This was measured in terms of AC's percentage of ACBD and charted in Figure 2. We propose the hypothesis that this propensity arose from the need to coordinate amorphously organized groups without established internal communications channels to participate in mass demonstrations through the use of convenient monthly publication schedules. If this hypothesis is correct, one would expect the depletion propensity to vary with the extent and intensity of organized mass demonstrations. This expectation seems to be borne out by Figure 2, though the evidence is only suggestive, not conclusive. The intra-monthly depletion propensity was generally higher for the Red Guard press (which was of course a more irregular "movement" epiphenomenon) than for the official press. In the 21-month period from January 1967 to September 1968, the ratio of depletion to accumulation in the Red Guard press was 16 months to five; in the corresponding 18-month period in the official press (which did not initiate criticisms until three months later), eight months showed depletion, seven accumulation, and three an even distribution. The average percentage of criticisms to appear in the first half of the month during this time period was 63.7% for the Red Guard press ($t=2.37$, $p < .025$) and 53.7% for the official press (statistically insignificant). The extinction of the Red Guard press after August 1968 coincides with the nation-wide dispatch of "worker-peasant Mao Tsetung Thought Propaganda Teams" to the campuses and to newspaper offices to quell disputes among Red Guard factions and bring to a close all "spontaneous" demonstrational activities.

The second propensity is that of intra-monthly *diffusion*: the month would begin with a high percentage of attacks against Liu Shao-ch'i and a

low percentage of attacks against others and would end with a high percentage of attacks against others and a low percentage of attacks against Liu, reflecting the inability of the leadership to sustain its control in the face of grassroots impulses to spread the attack to more immediately threatening (local) targets. The diffusion propensity may be formulated $A:C::D:B$, or more simply, $\frac{A}{C} > \frac{B}{D}$. This propensity was also associated with the interplay between “centralism” and “democracy” in the mass movement, and was hence not apparent in the centrally coordinated official press. In the Red Guard press, it was visible only during the months when concerted drives were launched: in January 1967 (a month which showed accumulation rather than depletion of total criticisms), 41% of the first-half criticisms attacked Liu but only 4% of the last-half criticisms did so; in February, 48% of the first-half criticisms attacked Liu and 23% of the last-half criticisms; in March, 22% of the first-half criticisms attacked Liu and none of the last-half. April showed concentration rather than diffusion (12%:70%), probably because the Red Guard press was successfully diverted from its inherent tendency to multiply targets by the massive official drive against Liu beginning March 31; but May and June also exhibited diffusion. The statistically significant relationship ($X^2 = 2.8, p < .10$) between choice of target and half of month in the Red Guard press during this six-month time period when criticism of Liu was at its height is shown in the following table:

TABLE III
Intra-Monthly Criticism Diffusion
 (i.e., relationship between depletion and target focus)

Time: Month

Target	First half	Last half
Liu	36% (32)	22% (12)
Others	64% (65)	78% (47)
	100% (N=97)	100% (N=59)

Thereafter no diffusion propensity was apparent; this was perhaps partly because the official press (whose leading organs were in the hands of the CCRG radicals from January 1967 till September 1967, when the “May 16 Group” began its fall from grace) succeeded to some degree in usurping the demonstration-guiding role of the Red Guard press, partly because the

Red Guards themselves seemed to lose interest in "dead tiger" Liu Shao-ch'i. After August 1967, no more than one polemical attack on Liu per month appeared in the Red Guard press.

INNOVATION AND DIFFUSION OF CRITICISMS

In the mass criticism campaign against Liu Shao-ch'i there were roughly three patterns of criticism innovation and diffusion. The first was innovation at the Red Guard grass roots, which attracted favorable notice by a member of the elite and was followed by diffusion through the Red Guard/official media. According to the accounts of most eyewitnesses, the criticism theme to the effect that Liu exercised "bourgeois dictatorship" and "white terror" by sending CC work teams to manage the GPCR at various schools during the "50 days" in June-July 1966 originated in this manner.¹⁵ Mao himself did not oppose the dispatch of work teams at the beginning; although it was later said he had serious reservations, Chiang Ch'ing admitted in the unexpurgated edition of her November 28, 1966 speech that "we have also gone through a process of development (*kuo-ch'eng*) in our understanding of work teams."¹⁶ The criticism of work teams can be traced in its progress "from the bottom to the top": those students who were harshly treated by the work teams during the 50 days pursued those work teams even after they were withdrawn, tracing responsibility for their dispatch first to Li Hsueh-feng, Mayor of Peking during the 50 days, and by November 1966 to Liu Shao-ch'i as "Li Hsueh-feng's wirepuller."¹⁷

A second style of criticism which seemed to originate at the grass roots was the personal *exposé*, which disclosed lurid details from the target's private life. These Red Guard "scoops" were based on highly enterprising investigative reporting: a Fukienese Red Guard (pen named Ken Ling) noticed during a "link-up" trip to Peking in the fall of 1966 that the Tsinghua rebels had visited practically every place Liu or his wife had ever worked to collect information; in T'aoyuan especially, nearly every commune cadre had been questioned "dozens of times." "We went to the NCNA and the Nationalities Commission, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission and the Ministry of Education—all distributors of Red Guard investigation team reports—to ask for more materials," a Tsinghua Red Guard told him. "We took everything they gave us . . . ending up with quite an assortment."¹⁸

¹⁵Cf. Neale Hunter, *Shanghai Journal: An Eyewitness Account of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Gordon C. Bennett and Ronald Montaperto, *Red Guard: The Political Biography of Dai Hsiao-ai* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971); Ken Ling, *The Revenge of Heaven: Journal of a Young Chinese*, trans. Miriam London and Ta-ling Lee (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1972); Andrew Watson, "Revolution in Sian," *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, LVI:3 (April 20, 1967), pp. 123-26; et al.

¹⁶I am indebted to Tang Tsou for this quotation from the unexpurgated edition of Chiang Ch'ing's Nov. 28, 1966 speech.

¹⁷*Mainichi*, Oct. 28, 1966, in *Daily Summary of the Japanese Press (DSJP)*, Oct. 28, 1966, p. 13; *Mainichi*, Nov. 25, 1966, in *DSJP*, Nov. 28, 1966, pp. 12-13; *Sankei*, Nov. 4, 1966, in *DSJP*, Nov. 9, 1966, pp. 10-13.

¹⁸Ken Ling, *Revenge of Heaven*, pp. 198-99.

The most widely lampooned victim of this type of criticism was Liu's wife, Wang Kuang-mei, who made the mistake of wearing a "bourgeois" pearl necklace and silk *ch'i-p'ao* during her 1963 visit to Indonesia.

Innovation at the grass roots was dependent upon attracting a favorable response (or at least not provoking an unfavorable response) at the Center to achieve diffusion. "This was a calculated risk and we won by sheer luck," recalled Ken Ling with respect to the selection of targets. "If we aimed at the wrong target . . . we would have been put down as 'counterrevolutionaries.' Many times, we Red Guards had this kind of worry."¹⁹ It seems certain that the protests by student radicals against the suppressive work team tactics would have indeed been "strangled in the cradle" by late July had not the Maoists picked them up and championed them. Most decisive in this regard was Mao himself; he wrote encouraging letters to rebel students at Peking University and Tsinghua-affiliated Middle School, ordered Nieh Yuan-tzu's first big-character poster broadcast over the national radio network on June 1, and in his own nationally publicized "first big-character poster" of August 5 he called attention to the existence of an "opposed road" at the Center and called on students to "bombard the headquarters" of the bourgeois reactionary line.²⁰ Only after the August 18 mass rally at T'ienanmen, when Mao received Red Guards, donned a *hung-wei-ping* brassard, and declared the Red Guards "a revolutionary youth organization legal under the dictatorship of the proletariat," did the Red Guards become a truly nation-wide movement, and pursuit of work teams and ultimate responsibility for their mistakes did not begin until two months later, under the aegis of the CCRG. The top-level Maoists appeared to play a more neutral role in the escalation of criticism in the fall of 1966, but not until the January Storm did they begin explicitly to repudiate such mass innovations as struggle rallies, personal exposés, and further pursuit of responsibility for work teams. Persistence of mass initiative in the selection of targets beyond this point is partly due to the inability of the elites to control the Red Guards without resort to force, partly to an apparent split within the leadership between the "Center" and the incipient "May 16 Group" in the CCRG.

The second pattern was for high-level elites to pronounce general criticisms, for these to be diffused through the media, and for lower-level polemicists to then make detailed elaboration of particulars and marshal supporting evidence. The detailed "black materials" resulting from this process would then sometimes find re-expression in authoritative statements by elites, resulting in a second cycle of accusations. For example, Lin Piao first spoke of the possibility of a "counterrevolutionary coup d'état" in his

¹⁹Ivan London and Ta-ling Lee, "The Making of a Red Guard," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 4, 1970, pp. 8-68.

²⁰During the October 1966 work conference Mao admitted, "I had Nieh Yuan-tzu of Peking University publish a wall poster criticizing Peking University President Lu P'ing, sent a letter to the Red Guards of the High School attached to Tsinghua University, and also wrote a wall poster, bombarding the headquarters of the Liu-Teng line." *Yomiuri*, Jan. 7, 1967, in *DSJP*, Jan. 9, 1967.

criticism of P'eng Chen in a secret May 1966 speech; this was subsequently elaborated into an allegation involving troop movements, secret meetings, and planned convocation of a CC Plenum in July 1966 to oust Mao. Although both Chou En-lai and K'ang Sheng rejected these allegations in the spring of 1967 for lack of evidence, they became widely accepted. The standard terms "revisionism," "Party persons in authority taking the capitalist road," and "bourgeois reactionary line" find their origins in the statements of Mao himself, and these established broad parameters for subsequent criticisms.²¹ Mao collaborated in a Commentator article titled "Treason to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat Is the Essence of the Book on 'Self-Cultivation' of Communists" which appeared in both *Red Flag* and *People's Daily* on May 8, 1967; this was a seminal contribution to the spring 1967 campaign which subtly shifted the general line of attack from criticisms of Liu's suppression of the revolutionary masses to criticisms of his "revisionist" economic and cultural policies, and the bureaucratic careerism manifest in his famous book "How To Be A Good Communist." As a third example, in 1967 the CCRG appointed a special investigatory committee for research on the "crimes" of Liu Shao-ch'i; on the basis of their findings CCRG leaders began in the spring of 1968 to accuse Liu of several counts of treason, and by July, Mao himself implied that Liu was a representative of the Kuomintang.²²

The third pattern operated surreptitiously: previously confidential "black materials" of rich detail would originate directly from the Center as "leaks," which would then be published in the Red Guard and sometimes the official press. For example, nearly all criticisms of Liu's errors during the 1962 retrenchment from the Great Leap Forward and during the 1964 Socialist Education Movement are based on quotations from previously unpublished sources, including private conversations with friends, *in camera* speeches and *obiter dicta*, and personal letters.

Though the *appearance* of these three patterns of criticism innovation and diffusion was not entirely dependent on the wishes of Maoist elites (*Q.E.D.*), their relative *influence* over the process of escalation seemed ultimately subject to Mao's veto-power. The escalation of criticisms against Liu followed a step-like progression, and the impact of these three patterns on the process

²¹Mao's concern with "revisionism" (as opposed to "dogmatism") dates from 1959. The first mention of "representatives of the bourgeoisie" in the CC is contained in Mao's 23-article document on the Socialist Education Movement, drafted January 1965, though more allusive warnings date back to Lushan. The first mention of "figures of the Khrushchev type" (whence the epithet "China's Khrushchev") is in Mao's May 16 (1966) Circular.

²²The following passage was "said to have been added by Chairman Mao himself" to a July 1968 article: "It has been ascertained that the tiny handful of top Party persons in authority taking the capitalist road such as China's Khrushchev are a counterrevolutionary black gang representing the interests of the Kuomintang reactionaries and that of the imperialists, bourgeoisie and landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements and Rightists. Quite a number of them are remnants of the Kuomintang reactionaries." "An Epoch-making Document," *Tung-fang-hung tien-hsün* (East Is Red Bulletin), Canton, No. 2 (July 1968), in *SCMP*, No. 4227.

varied from step to step. The first step extends from Liu's demotion at the August 11th Plenum to publication (and simultaneous rejection) of Liu's October self-criticism in the Red Guard press in December 1966. Pattern 1 (innovation from below, diffusion from above) is mainly responsible for this step, although patterns 2 and 3 were also in evidence.²³ The second step, the "February adverse current" (*erh-yüeh ni-liu*), precipitated by rebel "power seizures" in January, resulted in a temporary step backward in the quantitative escalation of criticism against Liu, while at the same time the decision to exempt other "power-holders" from future criticism implied a step forward in the *concentration* of criticism. The third step (the official press campaign beginning April 1, 1967) was decided at a Politburo Standing Committee and MAC joint meeting on March 14-18 and a Central Work Conference on March 27-28, then implemented by a coalition of CCRG, PLA, and "Central" elites. At this stage, Liu was invoked as a "pure" scapegoat to make possible the revival of the movement with even more extensive mass *participation* but minimal mass *initiative*. Liu was meant to function as a "reflexive incentive" to channel the movement toward constructive—or at least away from destructive—ends. Liu's role as scapegoat was only effective for as long as his plausibility as a threat could be sustained, whereupon the attacks tended to proliferate to the various targets whom Liu was intended to represent, and his function reverted from "scapegoat" to "symbol." Because Liu's "symbolic" function depended upon the perceived threat he posed, there was an inherent tendency to exaggerate the threat by distorting or fabricating fresh charges against him.

CONCLUSION

To what extent were the promises of mass line theory fulfilled by its revival under altered circumstances? The original mass line had three analytically distinct purposes: (1) to *facilitate vertical communication* between elites and masses; (2) to *achieve reasoned consensus* between elites and masses; and (3) to *enhance the masses' sense of political efficacy* by deferring to their will in making and implementing decisions. Our inquiry is concerned not only with the success of "mass criticism" in realizing these goals in the short term but in the likely durability of that success.

Vertical communication between elites and masses was immediately facilitated by each of the three patterns of innovation and diffusion outlined above. Although mass innovation was really only permitted in pattern 1, each pattern encouraged mass involvement in repeating and elaborating

²³Examples of pattern 2 are Mao's August 5 big-character poster, which was quite clear in implicating Liu ("Putting two and two together and calling to mind the Rightist tendency in 1962 and the erroneous tendency in 1964 that was 'Left' in form but Rightist in substance, do we not find something that should wake one up?"), in the 16-point Circular of the 11th Plenum, and in the public speeches of Ch'en Po-ta, Lin Piao, and Chou En-lai at Red Guard rallies. The best single example of pattern 3 is the publication by Tsinghua *Ch'ingkangshan* of Liu's October self-criticism (undoubtedly "leaked") on December 26, 1966.

given polemical themes, thus relating abstract criticisms to personal experience. The first pattern (innovation at the grass roots, followed by national dissemination through the media) played an influential role in the first and (to a more limited extent) third steps of the escalation process; in the second step (the February "adverse current"), excesses in rebel struggle tactics and goals seemed to have a counterproductive effect, resulting in termination of mass initiative in selecting targets and subsequent concentration on authoritatively designated targets. Thereafter mass initiative was manifest chiefly in attacks on local power-holders or struggles between factions; the incapacity of the anti-Liu campaign fully to co-opt this initiative finally led to its forcible suppression in the fall of 1968. The third patterns ("leaks" from the Center) lasted from August 1966 to around September 1967, when Mao sealed off the leaks by shutting down *Red Flag* and starting a purge of the "May 16 Group." As he told members of the 9th CC:

We adopted the method of issuing a communique so that foreign newsmen would no longer get our news (laughter). They said we had a secret meeting; we were both open and secret. . . . We may have eliminated all the traitors and spies they planted in our ranks. In the past, news about every meeting immediately leaked out and then appeared in the tabloid newspapers of the Red Guards. Since the overthrow of Wang (Li), Kuan (Feng), Ch'i (Pen-yü), Yang (Ch'eng-wu), Yü (Li-chien), and Fu (Ch'ung-pi), they have been shut down from any news about the Central leadership!²⁴

In sum, the conclusion seems warranted that the GPCR unquestionably increased vertical communication between hierarchical levels. In assessing the likely durability of this reform we may distinguish between mass-local elite relations and mass-Center relations. Through such devices as an accelerated *hsia-fang* of cadres, students, and service personnel, diminution of functional differentiation wherever feasible (to prevent meritocracies from forming), and provision of seats for representatives of the masses on Revolutionary Committees (RCs) at all levels, the Maoists have endeavored to institutionalize the mass line, and these efforts appear to be quite successful at the local level. The shut-down of the Red Guard press has resulted in a net decline in the quantity and quality of mass media since the GPCR, but this may be somewhat counter-balanced by a widespread revival of local popular media. Big-character posters continue to be used to discuss local issues and elections; correspondence teams have been sent to the basic units of factories and production brigades to write articles for local broadcasting stations and the local press; the construction of radio diffusion stations (which permit translation into local dialects) has been resumed; new publications produced by local workers' organizations to provide material for study sessions have appeared; local non-professionals have reportedly begun

²⁴"Speech to the 1st Plenary Session of the CCP's 9th CC," (April 28, 1969), in *Issues and Studies*, March 1970.

producing short commentaries, short dramas, poetry, and revolutionary stories for local consumption; there are reports of amateur itinerant film groups, story-tellers, even children's drama groups.

With respect to communication between mass and Center, only pattern 2 survived the GPCR, which is no more (or less) than existed previously. This pattern tends to move "from the elites, to the elites": general themes originate at the Center, iteration and limited elaboration of these themes in the local media is permitted, and the "feedback" that returns to the Center is little more than an amplified echo of the original themes.

The mass criticism campaign failed conspicuously to generate reasoned consensus either among elites or between elites and masses; consensus was eventually achieved by purging dissenting elites and using the army (or the "worker-peasant propaganda teams") to impose compulsory arbitration on dissident masses (such as the *Sheng-wu-lien*, or Tsinghua's *Ch'ing-kang-shan*). Instead of leading to consensus, the process of mass criticism led to sharpened antagonisms between groups which threatened to culminate in what Mao himself termed "civil war." We submit that the reasons for this change lie in three important differences between mass line *circa* 1942-44 and mass criticism.

First, there was an obvious change in *function*. The GPCR was a criticism movement; as such, it deliberately undermined inhibitions on the expression of grievance and sensitized people to "contradictions," which could be properly resolved only through "struggle." Praise of the martial virtues and a taboo on compromise encouraged parties to a contradiction to escalate their attacks on each other without limit. In contrast, the original mass line was intended to function as part of a policy making process. In divorcing the mass line from any immediate relationship to policy, the process was deprived of any chance for reality-testing; this permitted the immanent logic of Mao's Thought to be extended to its ultimate conclusions.²⁵ The only limit to the unfolding logic of ideology was often physical conflict with another faction holding a variant interpretation, and a growing gap seemed to develop between the articulation of Mao's Thought by the radical vanguard and its acceptability among the worker-peasant masses; subsequent adjustment of this gap involved abandoning several reforms as unfeasible and purging those unwilling to compromise.²⁶

²⁵It might be argued that substitution of polemics for policy had already taken place in the 1950s during criticism campaigns that were waged then. These earlier campaigns however began with clear authoritative designation of a target group and remained under tight organizational control. Cf. Yang I-fan, *The Case of Hu Feng* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, Dec. 1956), Vol. 18, Communist China Research Series; Chalmers Johnson, *Freedom of Thought and Expression in China: Communist Policies Toward the Intellectual Class* (*ibid.*, May 1959), Vol. 21; Theodore H. E. Chen, *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960).

²⁶Some of the more startling signs of this shift have been the rapprochement with the U.S.; retention of private plots, domestic industry, work points, and a rural free market; retention of the team as the basic unit of accounting; the purge of Lin Piao and Ch'en Po-ta.

Second, there was a change in *organization*: early capture of the pace-making sector of the official press and the creation of a comprehensive alternative media network made it possible for the first time to carry on a mass movement outside, even against, the Party apparatus. The advantage of conducting a campaign through the media outside the organizational framework was the possibility of evoking instant, spontaneous mass response;²⁷ the disadvantage was the difficulty of controlling that response.

From this magic Center directives emerge which in their abstract form and terseness say almost nothing. The directives from Mao are like a signal, which flashes on at times and triggers a Pavlov-effect on the entire political system. What comes from above is no longer a practical direction which is filtered through routinized machinery, but abstract commands, which have only the purpose of arousing the spontaneity of the masses.²⁸

The only message which could be transmitted in identical form to people in varied places and circumstances was so abstract that it lent itself to diverse interpretations. As Chang Ch'un-ch'iao caustically observed of Mao's "little red book" in 1968:

The reading of quotations has become nothing but a war of words. I will only read passages from the quotations which are favorable to me, but will not read anything which is unfavorable to me.²⁹

As noted above, the attempt to introduce Liu Shao-ch'i as a condensation symbol against which heterodox grievances could coalesce was successful only so long as the credibility of threat could be sustained. Eventually Red Guards in most cities coalesced along functional or occupational lines into "two opposing factional organizations" with links to adult elites; the radical faction aligned with the CCRG, the conservative faction realigned with the PLA after the authority of the Party had been destroyed.

Third, there was a change in *communication* patterns: innovation and diffusion pattern 2 was supplemented by patterns 3 and 1. Pattern 3, involving "leaks" from the Center, proved capable of blowing up elite disputes into mass struggles by leaking word of internal differences which might ordinarily have been resolved internally to the constituencies of the dispu-

²⁷At the October work conference Mao exulted, "I did not expect that as soon as the big-character poster of *Peita* was broadcast over the radio, the whole country would boil up! Again, was it not delightful that even before I had sent my letter to the Red Guards, the Red Guards of the whole country had been mobilized, and once they launch their attack, will collide even with you?" "Speech at a Central Work Conference" (Oct. 23, 1966), in *China News Summary*, No. 285.

²⁸Oskar Weggel, *Die Chinesischen Revolutionskomitees* (Hamburg: Mittellungen des Instituts fuer Asienkunde, 1969), pp. 88ff.

²⁹"Comrade Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's Speech at Chiao-t'ung University of Shanghai" (Jan. 18, 1969), *Tzu-liao chuan-chi* (Special Collection of Material), Canton, Feb. 10, 1968), in *SCMP*, No. 4146 (March 26, 1968), p. 3.

tants.³⁰ Pattern I involved rapid growth of an autonomous communications network at the grass roots level, which quickly became identified as the voice of the “masses.” This confusion of the Red Guard press with the will of the masses led to a serious overestimation of the radical proclivities of the masses, which was not corrected until Chou En-lai persuaded Mao to tour the provinces in the fall of 1967. As the meteoric careers of K’uai Ta-fu, Nieh Yüan-tzu, and others illustrated, the Red Guard movement became a channel for dramatic upward mobility, based on skills in symbol manipulation. This upward mobility was associated with the downward mobility of “power-holders,” whose offices Red Guards might expropriate in “power-seizures.” Thus there were tendencies to sensationalize the critique (and to push the personality cult to extravagant extremes) which were in some cases more related to the ambitions of the critic than to the demands of the masses or the erroneous views of the target.

Elites expressly deferred to the will of the masses during the GPCR, paying repeated tribute to their political efficacy. As Mao said in January 1967, “Neither I nor you have solved the question of T’ao Chu, but the rise of the Red Guards has solved it.”³¹ One of the reasons most frequently given for criticism or purge was failure to defer to the masses. There are reports that this deference has enhanced the masses’ sense of political competence, leading to greater popular participation in politics.

The durability of this enhancement of the masses’ sense of political efficacy is ultimately dependent upon an enhancement of their actual political efficacy. We may gauge political efficacy on the basis of two indicators: participation in making political decisions, and the size of the “cut” acquired in the authoritative allocation of values. By the first criterion, the gains of the “revolutionary masses” seem to have been largely nominal. Still, nominal gains are perhaps better than no gains at all, and the creation of seats for “mass representatives” at all levels of government at least legitimates the *principle* of popular representation in government; although these mass representatives tend to be excluded from important decisions and to have less power the higher one ascends the hierarchy, their very existence is an improvement over the prior arrangement, and their power at basic levels seems to be real. Moreover, even if they have little “clout” in the policy process beyond the local level, mass representatives appear to function as “ombudsmen” for the redress of grievances. The RCs, particularly the mass representatives, have become main correspondents for letters: the Kiangsu RC received about 12,500 letters from November 1967 to the mid-

³⁰“Leaks” reached epidemic proportions in January 1967 implicating Hsiao Hua, Chu Teh, Ho Lung, and several members of the CCRG, including K’ang Sheng and Chiang Ch’ing. Keesing’s Research Report, *The Cultural Revolution in China* (Keynsham, Bristol: Keesing’s Pub., 1967), pp. 24-25.

³¹“Speech at a Meeting of the CCRG” (Jan. 8, 1967) in *CB*, No. 892 (Oct. 21, 1969).

dle of March 1968, for instance, of which 95% had been answered by the beginning of March.³²

By all accounts, the share of disprivileged groups (particularly peasants, who still make up 80% of the populace) in the authoritative allocation of goods and services has appreciated considerably; this is evident in improved rural medical services, more egalitarian educational facilities, and in an immediate consumers windfall: since 1969, over 2,000 types of Chinese traditional and Western medicines have reportedly been reduced in price by an average of 30%, and such items as bicycles, sewing machines, wrist watches and radios have been made available for mass sale.

By both criteria, then, the political efficacy of the masses seems to have been enhanced. At the same time we must take note of the subtle post-revolutionary devaluation of semantic coinage whereby "masses" have been redefined to exclude the actual agents of revolution and refer primarily to the most quietistic elements in the GPCR: the peasants. For the Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels, the GPCR's effect appears to have been counter-productive.³³

³²Weggel, *Massenkommunikation in der Volksrepublik China* (Hamburg: Mitteilungen des Instituts fuer Asienkunde, 1970), pp. 34-35. Weggel also notes that prior to the GPCR, political communication was controlled through a net leading to the Central Propaganda Department; control has since been decentralized to the provincial level, where each RC has its own "political department" in change of "public opinion." *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

³³Thus a cadre taunted reluctant students with their own words: "Some of these students, when rebelling, shouted about 'daring to climb a mountain of knives and plunge into an ocean of flame.' Now, when Chairman Mao tells them to go to the mountains and to the countryside, they don't even dare to speak!" These words "hit the young generals on a sore spot," and "all of them quickly applied to go to the countryside." *China News Summary*, No. 240 (Oct. 3, 1968), p. 5. On Sept. 3, 1968, Shanghai's *CFJP* published a "Comment on 'If I Had Only Known This Day I Would Not Have Done It,'" acknowledging that this rueful feeling seemed to be quite common.

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